

CLASS OF 1971 50th REUNION SURVEY
MAY 2021

An extra-special “thank you!” to the 123 members of our class who persevered through online technical challenges and deep dives into our memory banks in order to complete the anonymous survey. This set of questions, unlike most past reunion surveys, was focused intensely on reflection — why we attended Mount Holyoke, how the experience affected us, what our lives have been like since, our accomplishments and challenges, and the life lessons we believe useful for others.

This means we did a lot of writing in answering the 50 survey questions in honor of our reunion year. Following is a section-by-section synopsis, with a small smattering of (in some cases excerpted) responses and comments to provide as much range and flavor here as we can fit into our printed reunion book. A complete set of responses/comments is posted on our class website, and we suggest opening that tab to read as a companion piece to this summary.

Now, before you re-enter the time tunnel, put your feet up and get out your reading glasses — and maybe a cup of tea or other libation for a toast to our past and present selves!

Statistical note: Percentages are calculated on the number of answers to the particular question being discussed. This varied widely, as you will see on the website. Percentages cited will add up to 100 only when the questions elicited yes/no or other data-gathering responses. However, it proved necessary to estimate rough percentages from comments describing multiple rationales for actions, or those identifying a range of personal choices. These latter percentages will not be anywhere near precise, but were calculated simply to aid description.

Thinking Back

Why we chose to attend MHC — All 123 survey respondents answered this question. (In fact, this was the only survey question that everyone answered.) Most of us had several reasons, although one classmate said she cannot come up with even one — in fact, she recalls not liking Holyoke at all but loving Vassar!

A full 25% of respondents (1/3 of these with family who had attended previously) chose Holyoke because of memorable recommendations (or in some cases an insistent push) from family, friends, or teachers. However, a few of us chose the school as an act of family rebellion (a sign of those times?), and one of us wanted to prove her unsupportive guidance counselor wrong!

But for over 40% of respondents, a key reason we attended was because of MHC’s strong academic reputation and liberal arts program; at least ten individuals specifically cited the school’s strength in math or one of the sciences. And over 10% of us were looking to attend one of the Seven Sisters or an Ivy League school. 25% were looking for an all-women environment for learning, and 20% were awestruck by the beauty of the campus.

Less frequent reasons for attending included location — although some of us wanted to be close to home, and others far away! A number of respondents, especially those who had a chance to visit campus before deciding, said MHC felt like home because of the friendly, welcoming atmosphere. Financial aid, the proximity of other colleges, and the study abroad program were least often cited, but were important factors for the individuals who mentioned them. Examples:

- * Both my high school academic advisors and my parents encouraged me to apply to the best colleges that appealed to me (and that took women in those days). Mount Holyoke was among those and when I visited the campus, that sealed the deal; it felt like home.
- * Academic reputation, the right distance from home (3 hours), the beauty of the campus itself, the rural setting (since I was coming from a small family farm, I was intimidated by more urban settings).
- * My first impression was “what a beautiful campus”. I loved that it was in a small New England town. The size of classes, liberal arts programs, no “boys” and the quality of the education all appealed to me.
- * Not having been able to come to the college for a visit, I only had photos to go by. I was actually attracted to the beauty of the campus, the lakes, and the liberal arts perspective of the curriculum.
- * I wanted a college where women were in charge and not afraid to speak up in class.
- * After spending all my years in [urban] male dominated educational systems I wanted an environment where women could be heard in a rural setting.
- * I also preferred a women's college because I wanted to focus on studying vs. partying and trying to appeal to men and compete with other women for the attention of men (as in high school).

Would we attend MHC again ourselves, and have we encouraged others to attend the college? In our 10th college reunion survey (with 257 respondents!), 65% said they would once again choose to attend MHC. The passage of time has not changed our view — now, 67% of the 109 who answered this question also said they'd attend MHC again. However, 77% have encouraged others to attend! It's likely that this anomaly is because of the ambiguous way the first question was framed. Sorry! Some of us looked at the decision from the perspective of what the college was like — and what our young selves were like — at the time, while others looked at it from today's perspective.

That said, one conclusion that can be drawn fairly clearly is that at least 25% of respondents would have preferred a coed experience if given the choice, as long as the coed school provided similarly high academics. Examples:

- * Knowing what I know now, I would make the same choice at that time. If I were choosing today, I might select a coed school, having attended an all-girls high school. But it would be my loss, because I loved my years at MHC.
- * Very disappointed in MHC not having maintained its reputation as it always is ranked lower than the other 7 sisters and other comparable liberal arts colleges. Also I think that women' colleges are archaic, and this has caused the best applicants to go to coed colleges.
- * MHC changed my life. It gave me the chance to learn to love to learn.
- * It's hard to know. Our choices were so different then.

- * Yes, although now I would have additional reasons beyond the storybook beauty of the campus. There's the college's small size and intimacy, its commitment to the scholarship and growth of women, its global focus, and of course the quality of the teaching.
- * Yes. In retrospect, I think I grew more as a person because of the examples and encouragement for women in positions of authority. I probably would have deferred more to men at the co-ed school and wouldn't have found my voice. I also might not have developed the long-lasting friendships.
- * It was the right decision in 1967 perhaps, but I no longer feel it would be today. I think MHC may be perfect for some, but not for me. I would prefer a more rigorous and coed college.

Our most vivid memories of our time on campus paint a fascinating mosaic of experiences and emotions — everything from burgeoning friendships to the overwhelming beauty of the campus to traditions (Mountain Day, milk & cookies, napkin boxes, etc.) to profoundly affecting political experiences to frappes at Friendly's! Each respondent could have written a book — that we'd all relate to, and would love to read! Here are just a few “chapters” to whet your appetite:

- * First and foremost among my memories are so many shared experiences with classmates, many of whom became lifelong friends. I loved many of the traditions: Mountain Day, M&C, inviting faculty members to dinner. I enjoyed swimming in the pool and biking the area as a break from studies. Many of my classes were very memorable. One aspect of Mount Holyoke that I've shared with many over the years is the supportive atmosphere, and the lengths to which faculty would go to help students succeed. A low point was the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. -- one of [the] moments in life for which I remember exactly where I was when I heard the news.
- * Friends, the riding program, English classes. Miss Kaufman saying "there is no area of life that is not relevant to an English major." Student strike after the US bombing of Cambodia.
- * Thought provoking class discussions Protests of 1970/71
- * Loved tea on Fridays, autumn in New England, small classes. Freshman mixers made me wish I had gone elsewhere.
- * Friends, nature/beautiful campus, labs, classes, bridge, tea.
- * Once the Afro-American House was established, I felt connected in a way I had not felt previously. The friendships that developed with the women of color in my "freshman" year dorm are still very strong today. The lowest point was the realization that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated. Though there was a vigil, I felt quite disconnected from my family and friends "back home."
- * Mountain Day was great! As were all special celebrations/events; personal relationships were always challenging and feeling accepted and 'ok' prevailed. Bad time senior year facing going out on my own into the world.
- * I remember finishing finals on a wet but lovely day in May. The smells, sounds, feelings that day come to me even after 50 years.

We remember our professors! From the 105 responses to this question, it's clear that many of our professors had strong personalities that created lasting memories. But while this question was not designed as a personality contest, students of Ellie and Tom Reese (psychology) carry the day — 13% mentioned the strong influence Ellie and/or Tom had on their lives, in school and later in life. Next in line were Chuck Trout (history) and Vicky Schuck (political science) at 9%

each, then, in descending order, Marjorie Kaufman (American Literature), Leonard De Longa (art), Isabelle Sprague (biology), and Anna Jane Harrison (chemistry). Many other professors were mentioned, whether because of their patience, toughness, dynamism, kindness, passion, or intellectual intensity. Of course, a few professors were NOT remembered fondly — but the good news is that almost all of the reported memories were clear and cherished.

Would we choose the same majors again, and were our majors relevant to our work?

Perhaps our good memories of professors tie in with the finding that 80% of respondents would indeed choose the same majors again. In fact, 50% found their majors “very” relevant and 26% “somewhat” relevant to their principal field of work. 24% found them to be only marginally or not relevant, and 10% are simply not sure whether they would once again choose the same major or not. But we’re a creative group — as indicated in a number of responses, even many of those who found their majors relevant to their work said they might want to explore ways to customize their college studies.

Did MHC boost our confidence? For 73% of respondents, the answer is yes; the MHC experience did indeed increase their confidence in their post-college potential. However, it was hard for 18% of respondents to sort out how their confidence levels were affected — some high achievers in high school “hit the wall” academically in tough MHC classes and rebuilt their self-esteem only when they successfully earned their diplomas! Sadly, the diploma did not help the 10% of respondents who reported a lower degree of confidence as they left campus.

The skills we developed during college that still sustain us vary widely — from typing to resilience to playing bridge to curiosity! However, perhaps predictably, friendship skills top the list (11% of respondents), matched almost equally by writing. Analysis and critical thinking were each cited by 7% of respondents.

Describing ourselves at college and again today elicited an array of responses that warrant a close read, since generalizations might be misleading. That said, one thing that does stand out is that at least 17% of respondents report that they were more quiet, shy, or uncertain when starting college than when graduating — or certainly today!

Do we remember the ‘60s? Well, 66% of respondents believe they were indeed children of that decade — not so much because of sex, drugs and rock & roll, but because of their involvement in civil rights, racial justice, women’s rights, anti-war activities, etc. However, only somewhat less than 1/3 of respondents said these movements affected their post-graduate choices. A small sampling follows:

- * Action against the war certainly did. Took me years to find the right personal path to support women's rights but ultimately I became a mentor to many, many young women and an implementor and enabler of diverse employment environments.
- * I believe living during the 60's gave me a moral compass to then create a professional pathway to social justice and applied criminology.
- * Made me a lifelong Democrat.
- * All influenced my decision to go to law school to have the skills and position to change things.

- * [It] was the environmental movement that most directly affected my whole life. During the one semester I spent away from Mount Holyoke – 2nd semester junior year at U Wisconsin in Madison – I met my future husband because he was an organizer of the first Earth Day, and I was a volunteer. Our life's work grew from that. Our eco-tourism company, Journeys International, was devoted to understanding and preserving the planet's natural and cultural diversity.
- * Yes, I made a career researching and teaching about American women's history. I consider it a contribution to the women's rights movement.

The advice we'd give to a young person graduating now from college? As in previous reunion surveys, it's hard to encapsulate responses to this perennial question. But more than 10% of the 109 responses mentioned some form of "follow your passion" advice. And a slightly larger number urged being open to experiences, opportunities, adventures, career paths, and the world! Samples:

- * Keep an open mind. Learn to be flexible. Be prepared to change careers, probably more than once. Remember to take care of yourself.
- * Just follow your dreams but make sure that you have a solid background to understand those dreams and know what you realistically can hope for when you make them happen for you.
- * Take advantage of all the college has to offer, from classes, to the gym, from the library to the barn. Many of the friends you make today will be your friends for the rest of your life.
- * Don't be afraid to take risks. Don't be afraid to ask for help. There are people around who will help if you ask for it.
- * Keep on learning.

Work/Career

Ours was NOT a generation to get our "50 years on the job" retirement watches! To the contrary, 82% of respondents reported that their **career trajectory evolved over the years**. For 16% of that group, job changes were a result of deliberate choice, and only two respondents said the changes were totally involuntary. But for the vast majority, not surprisingly, job changes resulted from a combination of factors:

- * I took deliberate steps to create my career, but my trajectory was also shaped by external events.
- * My career evolved through a combination of my curiosity, deliberate choices, and mentoring/encouragement from others.
- * Informed serendipity - doing my best to respond with optimal choices among available options each time I changed jobs.
- * It was not involuntary but neither was it a deliberate choice. The evolution resulted from a willingness to try new things without being certain where they'd lead.

We have spent our lives as medical professionals, lawyers, business owners, artists, consultants, reporters, editors, moms, travel agents, and geologists (just to name a few careers!), but over 50% of us have worked either full or part time in some overtly educational field. In fact, one

respondent (speaking of herself) said it best for all of us: “Although quite different jobs, there has been a theme of helping people reach their potential.”

This generalization holds true when we described the **most satisfying aspects of our work or biggest challenges**. While a number of us overcame personal and institutional crises, only some 25% even characterized such challenges as barriers. Many others spoke of challenges as an opportunity to continue to learn, grow, achieve, and help others:

- * In the end, I loved making a difference in people's lives as they learned leadership and people skills.
- * I like being able help creators create.
- * The most satisfying aspect of my work was gaining the trust of my students and seeing their progress.
- * Working with children - most satisfying AND most challenging.
- * It was intellectually stimulating and enjoyable enough to be a game.
- * I made a difference in many lives. What could be more satisfying?
- * Satisfaction from getting recognized for skills and abilities; sense of accomplishment.
- * Helping new writers along their paths.
- * Satisfying success in a male-dominated finance field.
- * Working with people and seeing them grow has been wonderful.

Despite our good intentions, more than half of 108 respondents (56%) also encountered **equity issues or barriers** in our careers. Examples:

- * In general, my pay was less than male counterparts even when my productivity and quality of work was superior.
- * I was once told I was "too young and good looking" to do biofeedback therapy....
- * Barriers to placement, advancement and recognition. Unequal compensation, sexist attitudes, sexual harassment, hostile work environments.
- * Women professors earn less, on average, than their male counterparts.
- * In the fields I chose, it was and continues to be a man's world.
- * I hit the glass ceiling so many times, my head hurt.

Those who said “yes” to that question were then asked to identify **what aspects of their lives were affected** by the equity issues or barriers they encountered. Unfortunately, the online survey tool skewed responses by not letting respondents select more than one affected area! Nonetheless, looking only at the boxes checked, salary increases topped the list at 37%, following by promotions (19%) and hiring (11%). Looking also at the written comments, it’s clear that approximately 10% of the 62 individuals who reported equity barriers experienced repercussions in all aspects of their lives.

In addition, 29% of the 62 respondents said that “other” areas of their lives were affected (not just salary, promotions, hiring, or education). Some of the comments illuminated those additional areas:

- * Financial aid taken away after marriage- while male classmate got more because he had a wife to support!
- * The way I was treated by some.
- * I did not get the opportunities to grow my company without male authorization.
- * Self-esteem.
- * Toxic working environment.
- * I retired earlier than I wanted to.
- * Just being the only woman in many jobs and committees.

Race & Gender

94% of respondents were White. Four individuals reported as Asian, three as Black or African-American, and none as Hispanic. Only two individuals reported that they **identify as LGBTQ**.

Acts of racism while at Mount Holyoke were complicated — while 76% of the 113 respondents said they never experienced acts of racism, three reported being the targets of other students and one of a professor. Some spoke of other concerns — several mentioned experiencing passive or active anti-Semitism (including a school quota on acceptance of Jewish students!), and classism — being snubbed by more affluent students while waiting dorm tables to make money. In addition, some mentioned the overarching concern that it is often difficult to understand the intentions of others. On the positive side, some respondents were happy to have the opportunity to broaden their understanding of others — and would have welcomed a more structured framework in which to learn.

Sexual harassment was more widely experienced — in fact, a distressing 65% of 114 respondents experienced sexual harassment at some point in their lives. Again, it's a little hard to tell where they encountered that behavior, since the online survey tool would not permit respondents to check more than one box. But looking only at the boxes that were checked successfully, slightly over half were harassed in the workplace, 10% in school, and 20% in their personal lives. Looking more deeply into the comments, at least 15% of respondents would have checked more (or all) boxes. And one comment, given our focus on reflection, articulates well a sentiment expressed by many — albeit in different ways:

- * I think that I answer this question in retrospect. At the time I would not have called it sexual harassment, but just the way things were when you went into a field dominated by men. I did not have the luxury to take offense, or let it get in my way. As more and more women entered the field the harassment decreased.

Achieving “firsts” — while race and gender issues have certainly left their marks on us, it would seem that many of our classmates have battled through to make their own marks on the world. 28% of 100 respondents reported achieving “firsts” as a woman or as a woman of color. Just a few examples to illustrate the range of these impressive achievements:

- * First person in my family to attend college.

- * I was the first Women's Rights Coordinator for Mass. CLUM [Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts; now ACLU of Massachusetts].
- * First woman in the company with a manager's title.
- * First female faculty member to be awarded the teacher of the year award by the graduating law class.
- * Chief Public Defender State of CT.
- * First woman rector in three churches.
- * First all-woman law firm and with next firm first woman partner.
- * First woman hired as a fulltime teacher at a prep school that was going coed.
- * I was a White sponsor of a Black sorority at the University of Missouri.
- * First woman ever to be the Divisional Vice President of the Program General Arrangements Committee of the Million Dollar Round Table.
- * Youngest and only pregnant AVP at a major US bank.
- * First woman to receive tenure in the History Department and go up through the ranks including being granted an endowed chair.

Life, Health, Activities

We seem to be a reasonably settled lot — almost a third have **lived in the same place** for 20-30 years, 28% for 30-40 years, and 23% for 10-20 years. A significant 11% have been easy to find at the same address for 40-50 years (maybe just moving a couple of times right after graduation)! But there are a few of us (4%) who keep on truckin'

Living outside the USA has appealed to perhaps a third of respondents — for study abroad, second homes, sabbaticals, research, work, or sheer adventure. If you're thinking of taking a trip anytime soon to Canada, you might want to look up one of the four classmates who've resided there for 30-45 years. Or head to France — one classmate has lived there for 48 years!

Speaking of trips, let's jump ahead to the “**where do you still want to travel?**” question. Almost all of the 110 respondents seem eager to doff those face masks and head almost anywhere — from the supermarket to “everywhere” (with a few favorite stops in between)! In addition to the international travel many of us seem to crave, several intrepid adventurers now want to see more of the USA. (Anyone else remember the old car commercial — “see the USA in your Chevrolet”? But maybe consider a Tesla now!)

That positive attitude comes across in our view of health as well as travel. Despite dealing with a significant number of **health** challenges that are very serious indeed, survey respondents all reported good or excellent health! Perhaps our **activity levels** are helpful; 81% of respondents **volunteer** actively in too many varied and impressive ways to generalize (see samples below), and we stay **physically engaged** — popular activities include walking, hiking, swimming, exercising, dancing, biking, kayaking or canoeing, yoga, golfing, or playing tennis.

Samples of volunteer activities:

- * Board member of civic orchestra, board member of women's groups.
- * Religious organizations; have volunteered for MHC class and admissions in the past and now for reunion; community non-profit organization; local political groups.
- * Hospice, cancer organizations, arts organizations.
- * Church; homeowners association; Mount Holyoke fundraising.
- * Voting rights...and tree conservation take the greatest part of my time.
- * Visiting nurse association (Board member), public library (fundraising).
- * I am very active in politics and political campaigns.
- * Fair trade, animal shelters.
- * My career was basically a volunteer job.
- * Food pantry, "aging in place" neighborhood organization, local Quaker meeting.
- * American Library in Paris, volunteer in children's services, book group co-leader.
- * Legal organizations providing services to the poor; professional organizations helping to educate poor/immigrant women.
- * On the board of trustees for a land trust; national reform effort in biology education.
- * On board for many years of nonprofit that provides support for children who have lost parent, sibling or other key person.
- * Read for the blind, ran a community podcasting org., sit on boards of theater groups and art galleries.

Religion or spirituality, for 67% of us, is also an important part of our lives. Many of those respondents noted in their comments that religious faith provides a source of strength in facing life's challenges. To others, who might not see themselves as "religious" in the conventional sense, church provides community and support. Over 10% of the 61 who wrote comments described themselves as spiritual rather than religious, some finding spirituality in nature. Almost a third of the total 111 respondents to this question said that religion or spirituality was not an important part of their lives, but only three described themselves as atheists.

Hobbies and interests also contribute to our energy and positive attitudes. While we did not poll classmates on what their hobbies were (focusing instead on how their hobbies have changed over the years), it's clear from the comments that our interests are all over the map — we're a pretty eclectic group, from creative arts to genealogy to horseback riding to collecting small press books! And yes, for 68% of the 107 who responded to this question, our hobbies and interests have indeed changed over the years — and may well continue to change. A few samples:

- * Arts and crafts changed to gardening.
- * My interests have ... evolved in more creative ways.
- * I just find more ways to be outdoors....
- * I've gotten more actively involved in music, and more discriminating in choosing entertainment.
- * My good fortune keeps me exploring.
- * I read a lot more non-fiction than I used to.

- * For years, I focused on performing arts. Now, I am more interested in fighting food insecurity in children.
- * I have become much more interested in politics.
- * Gardening and birdwatching are newer interests.
- * Got into painting in my late 50's.
- * They've evolved like I have.
- * I used to ride horses and now I play bridge - physical limitations of aging....
- * Greater interest in historic sites, cultural exploration, international travel.
- * I used to ski, race bicycles, windsurf--now my pursuits are more low key.
- * I am *wicked* into genealogy and family history now.
- * They continue to diversify. I don't expect ever to be bored!

While keeping up with the news is not exactly a hobby, it's been a critical activity for all of us this past year! **What are our preferred sources for news?** While our travel has been limited, our options for gathering news have never been as wide — we now have blogs, news apps, and podcasts!). Most respondents say they have several preferred sources, and have kept the print newspaper habit while also endorsing online options (64% and 48%, respectively). The TV, at 54%, is also important. Only 11% reported getting news from radio, and, at 4%, print magazines are on a par with Twitter and other social media. When it comes to newspaper preference, 31% of respondents volunteered a continued affinity for The New York Times, and 12% mentioned The Washington Post as a key news source for them. On the lighter side, one of our classmates eschews other sources and relies on her husband!

And which are the most frequently used digital devices used to read the news, work, or connect with friends and family? For a full 68% of respondents, it's the iPhone or other smart phone. A hardy core of 7% of us is still hanging onto our “not-so-smart” cell phones — the same number of respondents who, at the other extreme, admit to being pretty much constantly on their smart phones. However, over half of us are definitely on that phone — or other device — every day, and on multiple occasions throughout the day. We seem to have a slight preference for desktop over laptop computers for the hard work (47% to 45%), but roughly the same number of us (about 44%) use iPads as well. 17% prefer Kindles or tablets for reading and other light work, but it seems that only four respondents are at the forefront of the tech world; two who use Apple Watches, and one each with Alexa and Echo!

Our acceptance of — and a fair bit of enthusiasm for — digital devices do not extend to **social media platforms**. Although 64% of respondents said they use Facebook, 10% of those just read and don't post. 25% do use Instagram, 14% Twitter, and 10% LinkedIn. But over 25% took pains to say they do not use Facebook (or most other social media). For example:

- * I happily admit to being a luddite where social media is concerned. This gives me a lot more time for reading books.
- * I lurk on Instagram and have a LinkedIn account which I ignore most of the time
- * None. If I want to communicate with someone long distance I email, telephone or Zoom with the person.

Even when we're using social media, we are a skeptical lot — well over half of the respondents have serious doubts about **whether the benefits of social media outweigh the personal privacy risks or broader political concerns**. In fact, 38% have already concluded that the benefits do not outweigh the risks, and only 5% said yes! 18% answered “probably” and a full 15% are just not yet sure. Definitely an area for debate!

Not up for debate is **the importance of fellow MHC alums in our social networks**. 118 of us answered this question — and only 23% report that our fellow alums are not important in their social networks. MHC connections are essential for 21% of us, very important for another 23%, and somewhat important for 1/3 of us. Examples:

- * I enjoy being with them when our paths cross!
- * When I found myself in a very dark time, I reached out to 3 MHC classmates whom I had not seen in some years. They all responded immediately and with remarkable caring communications. It helped so very much.
- * Specific friendships are life-long, though we seldom see each other.

Technology has definitely improved those connections for 59% of us! Zoom figures large in the equation. For example:

- * I was less involved in the early years, but have become more involved over time and now we are Zooming each month to catch up! Extremely valuable.

Political and Civic Engagement

Kudos to the 10% of respondents who have held or now **hold elective political office!** While 90% have not, over half of those responding said that they are **politically active**. In number terms, that's 12 office-holders and an additional 50 classmates who are politically active in some way.

What do we see as the most pressing political/social/women's issues these days? In trying to pull out common threads from the 97 passionate responses, I hear “Danger, Will Robinson!” playing in my head. (I hope you all remember the TV show Lost in Space?) As one respondent said: “There's no end to the answer to this question.” Indeed, some of us wrote mini-discourses that are well worth reading in their entirety. We touched on issues ranging from race relations (roughly 43% of respondents), gender equality (33%), climate change (22%), and voting suppression (13%) — to the Trump administration, immigration, pandemic control, gun violence, lack of civil discourse, children's welfare, income disparities, and nuclear disarmament. And these are only the most frequently mentioned!

How have such policy issues affected our personal lives and outlook? Just a sampling of the many deeply felt responses:

- * My awareness is sharper [of Me Too and Black Lives Matter].
- * I'm a lot more cynical as the result of seeing how hard it still is for women to succeed.

- * I went into public service to attempt to address these issues. I continue to work to address them now as a private citizen.
- * I speak to local garden clubs about best gardening practices in the face of [climate] change.
- * 4 plus years of personal depression, discouragement [from the Trump years].
- * I am distressed and dismayed that we seem to have backtracked whenever apparent progress has been made.
- * I expect to be active in some form or other in politics going forward--not as a candidate, but as a worker behind the scenes.
- * I've chosen to fight hardest for fair and accessible voting and for environmental protections.
- * I'm a demon on recycling [climate change].
- * I am afraid for the first time even more so than I was after Kent State and when a NY State cop pulled a switchblade on me because I was hitchhiking....
- * I still very much fear for my granddaughters' futures.
- * I'm more willing to speak out.

Reflecting on Life

This section of questions elicited an impressive array of thoughtful insights about our own lives, as well as sometimes hard-won lessons on navigation.

Since our last reunion in 2016, and especially this past year, we've dealt with a ton of **life-changing events**. Foremost (but not by much) at 27% of respondents has been our own retirement or that of our spouse. Some of these have been staged, most seem happy to embark on new adventures, and others who haven't jumped on the ship yet are looking forward to doing so soon. But not unexpectedly this year, 25% of us mentioned the elephant-in-the-room COVID-19 pandemic as a life-changing event that has put lives on hold and caused us to rethink where we live, with whom, and how we look at the future.

The pandemic even edged out slightly what we might have expected to predominate at this point in our lives — increasingly serious health issues (24%) and the passing of loved ones and friends (20%). But grandchildren are never far from mind at this stage, either, whether or not the pandemic has kept us apart! 16% of respondents are enjoying those welcome additions to their families.

Perhaps deserving of special mention are the worries that 8% of us reported about our recent political landscape, including the 2020 election and the January 6, 2021 insurrection at the Capitol. Politics weighed heavily on our minds while we were in college, and as discussed above, not much has changed in that department!

Thinking about our life trajectories, we also looked beyond the last five years at **other key turning points or challenges in our lives** since graduation. With the benefit of hindsight, the events with the most long-lasting impacts have been marriage, divorce, remarriage, and (again) the passing of loved ones and friends. A few of us have weathered marriage storms (congrats to the classmate who celebrated her 50th anniversary!), but they have resulted in divorce for 19% of the 69 respondents — and remarriage for a few of those. Retirement, moving, and educational

opportunities were also cited by roughly 7% of respondents. But for a real flavor of the many other varied challenges we've faced, it's best to read through the full list of responses — it's hard in a survey like this (perhaps too hard, as at least one classmate said) to identify key turning points over a full 50 years!

Caregiving responsibilities are widespread — 62% of respondents have been or currently are caregivers, mostly for family members. We've learned that it's hard work to be a caregiver, and that getting old is no picnic either. But we have also learned the importance of self-care, the need to develop patience, and that it's okay to admit we're tired! Despite the difficulties, we have found that caregiving can have its rewards as well. But for the most part, we've learned that we want to change the dynamic when we become the ones who might need a caregiver:

- * If I ever need help as I age, I will ask for and accept it.
- * My husband and I have stepped up our efforts both at downsizing and keeping our health and estate plans up to date.
- * I'll start early to build a support system.
- * While you are still well and healthy, do all the things you would like to do.
- * Do estate planning early and inform your children of details.
- * Live each day fully.

Are we surprised about how our lives have turned out? This proved to be a tough question to answer — 31% of respondents said yes, and 23% no. But a whopping 46% were right in the middle, finding only some aspects of their lives now to be very different than expected. Approximately the same number (less than 10% each) have had to deal with divorce or death of a family member; whether they did or did not end up marrying; or whether they had or did not have children. And a few got down to the core of the issue — it all depends on whether we had or should have had any tangible expectations. For example:

- * I would have been surprised by anything as I did not have a clue how my life would turn out.
- * I never had a picture of what my life would be like.
- * Come now!! One doesn't have a crystal ball!

Thankfully, though, almost 10% of us reported that they have been quite lucky for the most part, basically saying that:

- * I have had a great life.

What are we proud of? For 67% of the 105 respondents, it's simple — family! Many of us are proud of our marriages, parenting skills, children, and grandchildren. The adjectives used say it all — those with children are thrilled to have helped build new generations of kind, well-adjusted, loving, resilient, skillful, engaged, active, wonderful, motivated, thoughtful, successful, exceptional, fantastic, fabulous, and responsible individuals! Of course, we're proud of other things as well — 30% of us highlight significant achievements in our careers or volunteer work, making a positive difference in the lives of our students or clients, or in our business ventures, our communities, and our country. We have a strong service orientation in our work and lives — 13% specifically mentioned feeling pride in doing our best to help others. But let's not forget the

satisfaction reported by a significant number of us that comes from “making it” on our own, facing life’s challenges with resilience, embracing risks with courage, and just remaining thoughtful and good people — who care about and support their friends.

What do we wish we’ve accomplished? Just like Frank Sinatra, we’ve had a few regrets — but unlike his song, we had enough to mention! 25% of respondents wish they had expanded a dissertation or had children or gone to law school or done a better job organizing photos or learned to play guitar or gone to circus school or written the great American novel, etc. But a number of us qualified those “wish I had” responses by noting fundamental satisfaction with how our lives have turned out in general. And some of us entirely rejected the concept of “regret” — finding it a waste of time to focus on anything but the present and the future.

And what do we still hope to do? Indeed, whether we’ve expressed regrets or not, almost all of us are still plowing ahead. We are life-long learners and doers, still wanting to write poetry and prose, publish, make music, be useful, stay active, start a new career, make jewelry, learn a new language, volunteer, teach reading, improve our skills, spend time with friends and family — and, of course, travel!

What are our plans at this stage? Once again, travel figures largely! In fact, 1/3 of the 91 respondents mentioned itchy feet — but the winner, at 38%, is spending more time with family (and especially those grandchildren!). Staying healthy and active was mentioned by a good 20% of us, and 13% of us are hoping to keep up with friends and maybe even expand our friendship circles. Approximately the same number report plans for simplifying life, getting rid of all that “stuff” that builds up over the years, and retiring or moving into retirement communities.

We have created pockets of joy during the pandemic! Whether or not we are surprised about our own lives, it’s far from a stretch to say that the COVID-19 pandemic threw a monkey wrench into everyone’s plans. It’s been a tough year or so, for sure, and we’ve all been affected in some way. But the good news for our class is that all but one of the 106 respondents has been able to find or create some pockets of joy (or at least enjoyment) to help us through. Here’s a sampling:

- * I’ve luxuriated in the solitude and silence.
- * Meeting with friends, walks or dancing in the park.
- * Would you like to see my knitting projects???
- * I have found walks with my dog, reading and writing helpful.
- * Music - singing, playing, listening, and dancing. Plus dark chocolate helps!
- * Zoom gatherings with family and friends, a lot of time outdoors, time to go through memorabilia
- * Mindfully celebrate multiple times daily!

How do we find peace of mind? It’s hard for more than one of us given distressing social and political concerns. But most seem to find some peace of mind from several different sources. It’s a fairly mixed bag, with many contrasting and intriguing insights, so looking for common ground among the responses is both difficult and possibly misleading. However, two answers do stand out from the rest: approximately 1/3 of the 95 respondents cited family — and the happiness and well-being of family members. Another 1/3 cited nature in some form, including

gardens, walking, bird-watching, outdoors, woods, and the water/beach. Other often-mentioned sources of peace (in descending order of popularity) were friends, religious faith, meditation, reading, yoga, health, and financial security. There is one, though, that deserves special mention just because it was so unexpected: cleaning horse stalls! Other atypical responses:

- * The sure knowledge there is always more.
- * The knowledge that the sun will come up tomorrow whether I am ready or not.
- * It must come from a Higher Power b/c there's not much out there to be found.
- * [C]learing up issues that come up with people, places or things IMMEDIATELY and without blaming anyone!!!
- * Random acts of kindness still exist.
- * When I achieve it I'll let you know.

What are our favorite sayings? There's no easy way to summarize the 76 responses to the last question in the survey — almost everyone seems to have her very own **mantra or pearls of wisdom** to share! Some are classics, and some are unique or amusingly quirky. But almost all can be characterized as thought-provoking, and it's a fun list to read in its entirety. I leave you here with a few examples to whet your appetite, and perhaps to help you chart your life course until the next reunion:

- * People who say it cannot be done should not interrupt those who are doing it.
- * A woman can do anything she wants...just not all at the same time.
- * It's never too late to have a HAPPY childhood!
- * The only thing we ever control in life is our own attitude.
- * People plan, God laughs.
- * Stay in the present.
- * Be the change you want to see.
- * Everywhere you've been is on the road to where you are going.
- * Life is short, [so] eat dessert first!
- * The sun will come up tomorrow.
- * Hang in there!

Final Note: Given the events of this past year, it may be appropriate to conclude this summary with the last saying listed above. Here's hoping everyone can "**hang in there**" until our 55th reunion, and that we will be able to gather in person then to tell our stories and just enjoy being together again on that beautiful campus!

Donna M. DiPaolo

With special thanks to:

Wendy Hagen Bauer, my partner in formulating and structuring the survey; and to Susan Sokalner Dickstein for a superlative edit!